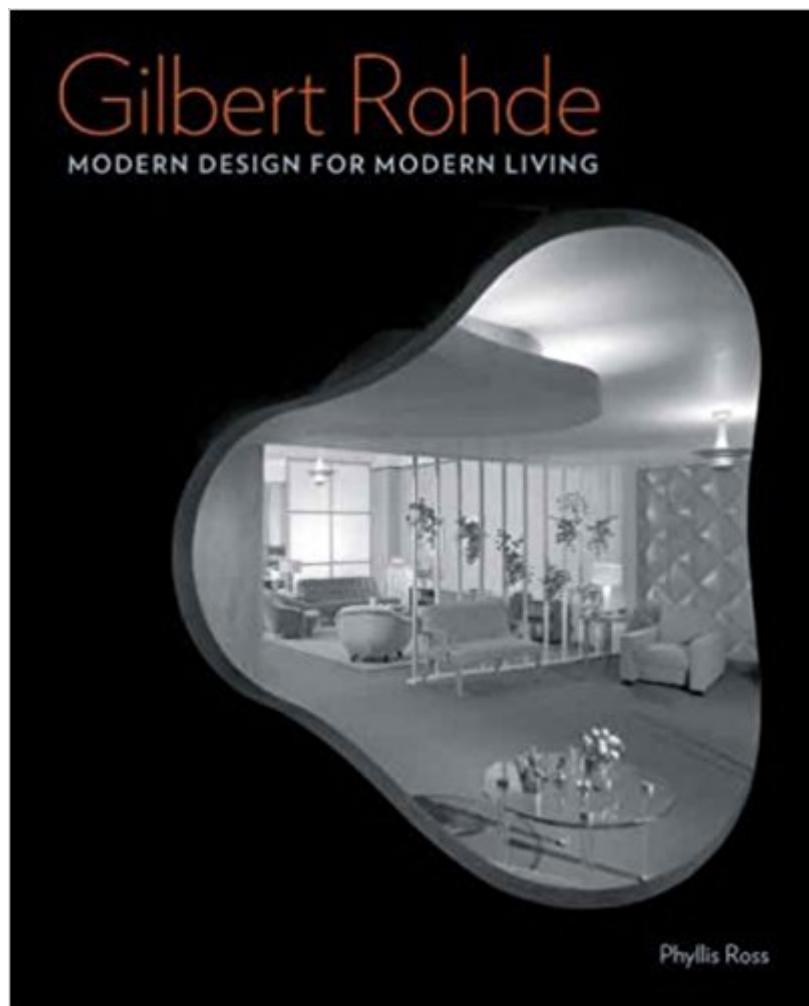


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# Gilbert Rohde: Modern Design For Modern Living



## **Synopsis**

Few designers did more to influence the appearance of postwar American interiors than the furniture designer Gilbert Rohde (1894-1944). This first in-depth book on Rohde explores how he brought an industrial design perspective to the furniture industry and, in the process, introduced modernism to a broad range of Americans, especially through his modular furnishings. By tracing his career at the Herman Miller Furniture Company, where Rohde was a designer in the 1930s and 1940s, Phyllis Ross places his work in a broad cultural and economic context. The book shows how Rohde's focus on comfort, informality, multifunctionality, and flexibility transposed European design antecedents into furnishings suitable for American lifestyles. A champion of modular components, he experimented with new industrial materials, including Plexiglas, and produced furniture with biomorphic forms. Not only did Rohde introduce modern designs, but he also devised a complete merchandising strategy for their promotion. Today Rohde's furniture and decorative designs are coveted by collectors. The story of his career rounds out our understanding of his fascinating contributions to American culture.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Phyllis Ross' new book on Gilbert Rohde, perhaps the most important American furniture designer of the later 1930s and 1940s, presents a great wealth of new material. It is a quantum leap over anything that has been previously published on this seminal figure and makes a significant contribution to the study of American design of the period."-Christopher Long, University of Texas at

Austin" This thoroughly researched book conveys the appeal and impact of Rohde's promotion of functional lifestyle spaces for modern Americans." -Library Journal "The first comprehensive look at the Bronx native's brilliant career." -Elle Décor "As Ross states in her introduction, 'A comprehensive appraisal of his diverse career is long overdue.'" -Interior Design "Meticulously researched, the book chronicles the designer's life and career." -Contemporary Collectibles

Phyllis Ross is an independent scholar specializing in 20th-century design.

GREAT BOOK.

I've been a collector of Gilbert Rohde's designs for Herman Miller, mostly the Paldao Collection of 1941, for many many years. Gilbert Rohde has been one of the more overlooked modern designers, for a number of reasons. Not much new has been written about him since a very good article in Arts Magazine in 1981, by David Hanks and Derek E. Ostergard. Most of us interested in Gilbert Rohde had to make do with information recycled from this article. Luckily, Phyllis Ross became interested in Rohde nearly 20 years ago, and has spent that time doing exhaustive research. She was fortunate enough to interview many key people who worked with Rohde during his rather short career, and also spent a great deal of time at the Herman Miller archives doing research. Because most of Rohde's other archives were discarded by his wife, very little material existed from which to create a complete picture of Gilbert Rohde as a man, and as a designer. Remarkably, Phyllis Ross has been able to piece together a full-fledged and rich biography, using her skills as a very talented research detective! This book - and its analysis of Rohde's innovations in design, marketing and manufacturing - should finally place him as one of the 20th Century's most important design geniuses. Rohde's designs for furniture and clocks have been known and appreciated by many of us for years, but Ms. Ross has uncovered and analyzed information which reveals that Gilbert Rohde's larger contribution was really his unprecedented innovations in marketing and promotion, and his concept that by educating the public on the benefits of good modern design, the public would naturally respond. Having anticipated this book for some time, it exceeds all of my expectations. The book is beautifully designed and illustrated, and includes many images I've never seen before. It really is an education; the notes (my favorite part of the book!) show how thoroughly and carefully researched this book is. Anyone interested in Gilbert Rohde will of course love this book, but it will also interest anyone interested in the design, furniture, art and cultural history of the early to mid 20th Century. Having been obsessed myself with Gilbert Rohde for so long, I'm grateful

and indebted to Phyllis Ross for honoring Gilbert Rohde, and his life and career, with such an impressive, insightful and intelligent book.

As an architect (now retired), while head of an office of a NYC agency that purchased \$65 million (retail value) of Herman Miller modular office furniture on my watch, I first heard about Gilbert Rohde from a staff architect, Charles Fissel, who had two full careers designing open landscape office plans with Herman Miller's action office product, first for YMCA's and then for my agency. So, when Phyllis Ross' book, "Gilbert Rohde: Modern Design for Modern Living," came to my attention, I thought it would be an interesting read. It turned out for me to be much more than that. It is an incredibly well researched, thoroughly documented, beautifully illustrated, and truly interesting account of the man, his influence on an age, and his heretofore-unheralded place in industrial and furniture design, manufacturing and marketing. The book depicts his roll in introducing modernism to the American family, first in furniture for the bedroom and the sunroom, then for small apartments and modest homes during the depression and war years. It traces the antecedents of his designs to his three trips to Europe in the late 20's and 30's to attend shows in Paris and to visit the Bauhaus at Dessau, and it documents his long history (from 1932 until his sudden death in 1944) as the principal designer for Herman Miller. In fact, he lead Herman Miller away from its former emphasis on traditional design to it's leadership after the war and continuing today in commercial office partition systems, casework and seating design. He achieved this in both the modular design and manufacture of systems components, by their flexible use in multiple and various combinations, and by the durability of a design line over multiple years. All that Gilbert Rohde achieved is so well authenticated by interviews, correspondence, photographs and archival research, both of the family and from Herman Miller. In addition, the author found much at the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City, and many other sources that the author ferreted out, some so obscure it "knocked my socks off." The copious footnotes are just incredible. I found this book by Phyllis Ross both exciting to read and to write about, as the reader can no doubt tell.

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